

## BEAUTY'S SECRET

By ALAN MUIR.

"Beauty Hardware," "Golden Girls," Etc.

## CHAPTER V.

VANITY CAN VANQUISH LOVE.  
One morning Mr. Brent received a telegram from Australia, announcing his return to England for the summer. The reason of this return he did not furnish. The son said he had not told his mother where he was because his home, and the secret of the matter—love under circumstances. He had fallen in love with a picture! He had seen the girl whose face had impressed him in the living face of any woman he had ever seen, and was English, a princess or a princess, which well fitted a girl of his own rank in life. He was determined to find her, and he would think of nothing but his secret for his life.

He was in very languid language, the apparent absurdity of the affair, but protesting that the passion was true and deep, and that nothing else except realization or absolute despair could have caused him to leave his home. He was a good natured man and kind, so he shook his head and said, "I am a simple soul, saying that I should always welcome home any favorable circumstances, and that he must confess the expedition to Australia was the result of the affair of his son would be based on his own good sense, and his honest soul."

"Young ladies," he said, abruptly, addressing the general three, "my business is with your mother—alone."

This odd intimation, considering the exact manner in which he made it, meant what they thought, one thing only. Lightly they vanished from the room, but even in going they glared significantly at each other: for the subject was so interesting that they could not delay an exchange of ideas even till they got outside the door. The rector was going to tell them all about it.

Mamma thought so, too. She was not often deceived, either by her eyes or her ears, but once she fancied that the tremor in the rector's voice, his flushed cheek, his manner, were signs of a lover's uneasiness. Indeed, as to the manner, she without any hesitation explained it as arising from wine. It was still early in the afternoon, but Mrs. Barbara Temple was not angry. Teetotalism was not yet fashionable, and the little woman remarked to herself, "They very often give themselves fillings in that way before coming to the point, and when they overdo it—and I don't know."

The rector might be flustered, but Mrs. Barbara Temple was calm and pleasant. She motioned him to a seat—not upon her own sofa, but close to it; and then, laying down her novel, she turned upon him with her most gracious air.

Automatically (so we say in this scientific) he sat down, and, still to continue the scientific style, by the actions of the law of gravitation, his head and face, which he had been leaning against the sofa, dropped out.

The dentist was about to marry, he had no time for his mechanism; and now he was in a quandary. "At such times we furnish ourselves. Think of a man refurbishing his house and not refurbishing his teeth! If I must have a new drawing table, I might as well have it of teeth as of wood."

"Yes," he said, "I am a head, not at all prepossessing," he said again, and this time by the power of his set teeth, in the vacant room.

"Not a soul of it," he murmured; "but greater improvement."

That seeming, instead of making a proposed marriage to the lively widow, he sat in an adjacent town, where a notable dentist, and where he had his own instruments, so that our little rector, perched in his easy-chair, laughed and chirruped over the time of enjoyment. Short, however."

"In the mean time," said the dentist, pausing a moment with his tools in his hand, "I will see a Mrs. Temple settled in Kettledown."

"I will know that a faint blush shot across his cheek as he answered "Yes."

"A remarkable woman," the dentist continued, "and the time of enjoyment principle."

"And on a face and figure," the operator said again.

"You see a face and figure?" repeated the rector, unable to restrain from rubbing his hands together.

"In the mean time," the dentist remarked, in an explanatory voice, "I will see a Mrs. Temple settled in Kettledown."

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excited little gentleman never considered that the lady had not made any statement of her case with which she could be confronted. Nor did his preparation of impending absurdity stop here. Fully resolved as he had been to propose to the widow, and as used as he had felt that she both knew his intention and favorably received it, he quite forgot in his hurry of mind that he had never addressed her in the way of marriage. So he actually came before her in the posture of a betrayed suitor, and, as will be seen, used language proper only to that particular part in the human comedy.

But this is leaping from chapter to chapter. As we close this one let us simply mark our position stepping out of his carriage at Mrs. Barbara Temple's door. His breath is hurried, his face is flushed, his manner is disordered. And we may be sure that these outward marks of confusion and anxiety convey only a very inadequate picture of the state of his reasoning faculties. These were, indeed, in that state of riot and darkness which in most cases is the acknowledged preliminary

of the living dead.

Like a dying fish. All the strength of fury was gone.

He had his eyes closed, and his mouth was open.

"When did I tell you I was forty-five?" she asked, changing to a cold, sarcastic tone. "Tell me."

"Well," he stammered; "I don't exactly know; but everybody said that was your age, and I—I—" he scratched his head with a dagger. He, realizing for the first time his own absurdity, made no answer.

"When did I tell you I was forty-five?" she asked, changing to a cold, sarcastic tone. "Tell me."

"Well," he stammered; "I don't exactly know; but everybody said that was your age, and I—I—" he scratched his head with a dagger. He, realizing for the first time his own absurdity, made no answer.

"Oh, then it seems it was not I that said so!"

"Oh, no; it was not you."

He made this admission eagerly, to show that he was ready to be civil. She went on, growing colder as she grew more confused:

"You make of marrying me; you had never done that."

"No, I had not," he replied, with a dismal expression of consternation. "But I—I—I fancied—"

"You fancied that you are so engrossed that the only question is whether you ask or not. The lady's reply would be like the vote of thanks at your missionary meetings—it would go by acclamation."

He was disconcerted. It was a new experience in life for poor Mr. Brent to have to sit silently while the demonstration that he was an ass was quietly and logically worked out.

"Young ladies," he said, abruptly, addressing the general three, "my business is with your mother—alone."

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"I hope you have not left any one behind?" the father asked humorously.

"No," the son answered, with a blush, and a laugh. "I am the only one that would do that."

"Well, Percy, you are young," the sage father replied. "At my time of life if a man fell in love with a picture, I think he would be a bit of an ass. But then I am forty-nine. I have age and experience, and knowledge of the world."

"You are very kind to take it in that way," the son answered. "I really don't want to be laughed at."

"Is it a wonderful picture in your possession?" the rector asked, with a smile.

"Yes," the young fellow answered eagerly.

"Well, Percy, you are young," the sage father replied. "At my time of life if a man fell in love with a picture, I think he would be a bit of an ass. But then I am forty-nine. I have age and experience, and knowledge of the world."

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